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AUTHOR	Soares, Anthony T.; Soares, Louise M.
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ABSTRACT

The study tests two hypothesis: (1) disadvantaged children have significantly higher self-perceptions than advantaged children at both the elementary and secondary school levels, and (2) disadvantaged and advantaged elementary school children have significantly higher self-perceptions than disadvantaged and advantaged high school students. 661 advantaged and disadvantaged students were used from both elementary and secondary levels. An inventory of forty bipolar traits was administered to the students in five forms to obtain five different dimensions of their self-perception. Results of analysis indicate significance between elementary and secondary students and between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. Also shown are significant interactions involving group and level factors. The report concludes that elementary school children have higher self-images than secondary school students, and that disadvantaged children also have higher self-images than advantaged children. (author/MC)

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Anthony T. Soares

Louise M. Soares

University of Bridgeport

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Anthony T. Soares

Louise M. Soares

University of Bridgeport

The Problem

Some of the research indicating positive self-perceptions for disadvantaged children can be interpreted in terms of social learning. Because many disadvantaged children associate with other disadvantaged children or modeling agents in their homes, schools, and communities, the self-images they have developed are reinforced by family members, friends, and teachers. Derbyshire and Brody (1964) believe that the self-image of an individual is partially defined for him by the significant people in his environment. Carter's study (1968) with Mexican-Americans supports this view. Since Mexican-Americans have their own peer groups to which they can relate and other social support, they do not rate themselves according to "Anglo" society's perception of them and so do not have negative self concepts. Other studies (Greenberg, 1965; Soares & Soares, 1969) obtained similar results.

Moreover, according to Landis, Datwyler, and Dorn (1966), the attitudes of the socio-economic class to which the individual belongs may be more important in the determination of the self concept than are the attitudes of other classes. Carter (1968) also concluded that it is probably the "Anglo" group which looks negatively upon the Mexican-Americans and so

assumes that these Mexican-Americans see themselves in the same way. This interpretation is supported by others (Anderson, 1965; Pruitt & Van de Castle, 1962).

However, what happens to a positive self concept when an individual leaves the insularity of a segregated environment and enters a more cosmopolitan and probably more pressurizing atmosphere? This was essentially the focus of the present research. More specifically, it was the intention of this study to discover whether disadvantaged children in neighborhood elementary schools have positive self-perceptions and, if so, whether these are maintained when the children enter into the more integrated world of the high school.

Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested:

(1) Disadvantaged children have significantly higher self-perceptions than advantaged children at both the elementary and secondary school levels.

(2) Disadvantaged and advantaged elementary school children have significantly higher self-perceptions than disadvantaged and advantaged high school students.

Methodology

Subjects

There were 661 subjects from an urban school system used in the study: 183 disadvantaged children at the elementary level and 138 at the secondary level; 190 advantaged children at the elementary level and 150 at the secondary level. The criterion of "disadvantage" was defined basically according to an annual family income of $4,000 or less, welfare aid status,

and housing in low-rent or subsidized tenements. The criterion of "advantage" was defined according to an annual family income of above $7,000, at least one adult in the family with a steady job, and home ownership.

Procedure

An inventory of forty bi-polar traits used in previous research with disadvantaged children (Soares & Soares, 1969) was administered to the Ss in five forms to obtain five different dimensions of their self-perceptions--self concept (SC), ideal concept (IC), reflected self in the eyes of their classmates (RS_c) reflected self with teachers (RS_t), and reflected self with parents (RS_p). In this instrument each trait is expressed in sentence form with a rating scale between each pair of traits indicating four spaces of distance.

Example:

I am a happy person.	_____:	_____:	_____:	_____	I am an unhappy person.
	very happy	more happy than unhappy	more unhappy than happy	very unhappy	

Five index scores were yielded from the algebraic sum of positive and negative traits so checked by the individual respondents on each measure. These scores were then treated statistically to an analysis of variance design for determining significance of mean differences in the group (disadvantaged and advantaged), level (elementary and secondary school), and sex factors.

Results

The results of the analysis of variance technique are found in Table 1, indicating significance consistently between elementary and secondary level students and between the disadvantaged and advantaged groups, except for the IC measure. There were also several significant interactions, mostly those involving the group and level factors. There were no significant sex

differences except in interaction with both group and level considered simultaneously.

The means and standard deviations are listed in Table 2. Except for the IC measure, disadvantaged children consistently had higher self-perception scores than advantaged children--whether at the elementary or the secondary level--and elementary school children had higher self-perception scores than high school youths--whether belonging to the disadvantaged or the advantaged group. The only exception was between disadvantaged and advantaged elementary school children's Ideal Concept scores.

Table 1
Analysis of Variance F-Ratios
for Self-Perception Scores
of Disadvantaged and
Advantaged Children

Source of Variation	df	F-ratios				
		Self Concept	Ideal Concept	Reflected Self Classmates	Reflected Self Teachers	Reflected Self Parents
Group	1	6.78**	2.92	4.38*	8.12**	4.17*
Sex	1	.89	.55	.26	1.09	.79
Level	1	5.98*	4.29*	6.06*	3.96*	8.82**
G & S	1	3.65	2.38	.91	2.28	1.77
G x L	1	5.49*	1.57	4.14*	4.37*	5.58*
S x L	1	2.42	1.38	1.48	1.57	3.82
G x S x L	1	5.73*	3.87*	2.52	3.98*	9.57**
Within	653					
Total	660					

N=661
*p<.05
**p<.01

Table 2
Means and Standard
Deviations of Self-Perception
Scores of Disadvantaged
and Advantaged Students

Group	Self-Perception Measure				
	SC	IC	RSc	RSt	RSp
Elementary level --Disadvantaged n = 183	23.94 9.15	29.33 10.42	23.31 11.29	23.96 9.26	23.63 10.67
Elementary level --Advantaged n = 190	21.12 9.30	30.18 10.37	20.67 11.07	20.00 10.24	20.91 11.27
Mean difference	2.82*	-.35	2.64*	3.96*	2.72*
Secondary level --Disadvantaged n = 138	20.31 9.01	26.75 12.17	20.79 12.04	20.46 9.98	19.43 12.02
Secondary level --Advantaged n = 150	17.12 9.98	25.24 13.67	17.95 10.75	16.02 9.84	17.13 11.20
Mean difference	3.19**	1.51	2.84*	4.44**	2.30*
Difference -- Elem. & Sec. Disadvantaged	3.63**	3.08*	2.52*	3.50**	4.20**
Difference --Elem. & Sec. Advantaged	4.00**	4.94**	2.72**	3.98**	3.78**

N=661 *P<.05 **P<.01

Conclusions

The most important conclusions which can be drawn are these: (1) disadvantaged children view themselves and think that others (i.e., their classmates, teachers, and parents) look at them more positively than do advantaged children; (2) elementary school children have higher self-images than secondary school students. Therefore, in comparison to elementary school children, both disadvantaged and advantaged high school students showed a diminishing of self-image--possibly due in part to the greater pressures of the higher level of education. There is some support for this conclusion from Coleman (1966), among others, who believes that, when minority and disadvantaged groups become part of an integrated school system, their self concepts diminish--but so do the self-perceptions of advantaged students. This latter finding is similar to what Rosenberg (1965) discovered in that the "Old Yankee stock" children have a self-esteem level which is lower than that of other groups--a surprising result since they tend to possess those status characteristics which are more likely to be associated with high self-esteem. It would seem that the change from neighborhood schools to integrated high schools, with their greater competitiveness and less security, contributes to the lowering of self-images for both disadvantaged and advantaged youngsters.

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